

A
LETTER

TO

JOHN CARTWRIGHT, Esq.

PRINTED AT YORK,

BY

LUCAS LUND.

1801.

TO
JOHN CARTWRIGHT, Esq.
BROTHERTOFT FARM,
BOSTON.

Burton-Hall, May 1, 1301.

DEAR SIR,

I Have taken a few days to consider the subject of your printed Letter of the 14th of March, because it is of great importance to the Public, that a National Opposition to the measures which have proved so calamitous, and to the abuses which have so nearly deprived us of all Constitutional Freedom, should be formed ; but not of less importance, that it should be formed on grounds which appear most likely to afford the means of success. When a Nation which is intitled by its Constitution to Liberty,

berty, is forced by usurpation or oppression to resort to extraordinary measures for the redress of grievances, the importance of the end pursued certainly should bear some fair proportion to the magnitude of the means employed. To call forth the exertions of a whole Nation, the object should be adequate; nothing less than the attainment of such a redress of grievances, such a correction of abuses as may secure the future enjoyment of Liberty, should be proposed; it ought to be a Radical Reform, on the Principles of the Constitution; and there ought to be a rational ground to hope it might be attained by regular and pacific means. On this point, I conceive there is an entire concurrence of sentiment between us; and considering the end thus limited to be the object we have in view, I shall take it for the foundation of my Answer to what you have offered in the Letter alluded to.

I would observe, then, that no Union of sufficient extent to deserve the name of a National Opposition, or to insure success in the way desired, probably can be formed on the principle you have laid down. The objections of the Rich to Universal Suffrage appear to remain in full force; and powerful as your reasoning is, in the latter part of your Letter, I conceive it will be unable,
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in any sensible degree, to diminish their fears. By adhering to that principle therefore, in the proposed Association, you will exclude a great majority of the well-disposed persons of that class, and oblige them either to range themselves with the Supporters of a harsh and corrupt system of Administration, or to remain inactive, and lost to the Public Cause. This, I sincerely think, will be the consequence of consulting Theory alone, instead of combining Theory, as I wish to recommend, with what Experience may teach to be practicable. If you will adhere to Speculation, without admitting any prudential modification, on account of subsisting prejudices, in that case the prospect before you will be a gloomy one. It will be, on the one hand, a scene of fruitless commotion, followed by the blood of many worthy, but rash and unfortunate persons, shed upon the scaffold, and the final establishment of that Tyranny you wish to avert; or, on the other hand, granting for argument that it might prove a successful effort, what will the result of it be, but the overthrow of the Constitution, effected by the violence of an irritated Democracy, overcoming, in this terrible struggle, the united power of the Crown and Aristocracy, and their numerous adherents in the most opulent

lent classes of the monied and mercantile interests? And what will this be, but a renewal of all the horrors of the French Revolution in this unfortunate Country, aggravated by the bitter reflection that they might have been avoided by more moderate measures, by a plan more cautiously limited at the outset of your enterprize. Such, as I conceive, are the consequences you have to expect, if you take grounds of Opposition too extensive to be yielded by any compromise, and on which you cannot hope to be joined by the great majority of the Opulent.

But if you will consent to blend Theory and Practical Prudence together, and demonstrate to the Rich, by the very principle of your Association, that you are equally careful to protect Property and to secure Liberty, you will probably be supported by that part of the Rich who still retain an affectionate attachment to Liberty; and you will even lessen the violence of opposition on the part of those Men of Opulence who are hostile to Liberty, either from prejudice or corruption. And you will gain these advantages without losing any part of your strength among the lower classes of the People. For although the proposed Association should not extend the Right of Suffrage beyond the line drawn by Mr. Fox
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and Mr. Grey, it still would be the interest of the lowest Classes to support that plan; and I doubt not, they actually would support it to the utmost extent of their ability. The principle adopted by Mr. Fox and his Friend, viz. to extend the Right of Suffrage to Householders not receiving alms, as I think, most judiciously manifests a due regard to Property, united with the necessary security of Freedom. It is perhaps the nearest approximation to theoretical perfection which could consist with the stability of Property as it is now enjoyed in this Country. By adopting it, as the principle of your Association, you will secure the greatest probability of success in your pacific enterprize, and be instrumental, I trust, in procuring the greatest possible Good to your Country, with the least mixture of Evil. You will act with the wisdom of Solon, who being intrusted with power to reform the State, gave the Athenians not the best Laws in Speculation, but the best which they could bear. The English Nation, by their morals, or by the distribution of their property, are not well fitted to receive Universal Suffrage. It is a privilege which they could not possibly acquire without a long series of calamity, which no political advantage could compensate to the present generation. And were it at this mo-

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ment an established Right, it would be ill exercised by the ignorant and unprincipled part of the Poor; it would be detested by the proud and timorous part of the Rich; and at last, it would be surrendered by the profligate corruption of the former, or forcibly suppressed by the no less profligate ambition of the latter. You will do wisely, therefore, and deserve the warmest thanks of every Friend to Peace and Liberty, as I judge, if you will ground this new attempt to effect a Reform on the combined principles of Liberty and Property. Our Ancestors, in their opposition to Despotism, were always careful to unite these two principles; and their success was probably not less the effect of their Prudence, than of their Fortitude and Patriotic Zeal. What probably may be gained for the Public, by these prudential means, will be entire advantage; its value will be inestimably great; and it will be without mixture of misery resulting from the struggle: It will save this Country from the impending evils of Anarchy and Despotism: It will complete what was perhaps unavoidably left unfinished by the Revolution in the year 1688, and perpetuate the English Constitution by a timely Reform, on the joint principles of Liberty and Property. And by holding forth to the World a noble example of a rational and
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pacific Reform, it will again endear the name of Liberty to our Species; the dangerous tendency to wild Revolutions will cease to terrify mankind; Military Despotism no longer will be fought or endured, as a refuge from the rage of Democratic Innovation; and peaceful Improvement will gradually and universally mark the progress of Society to the attainment of the highest happiness.

The most prominent of those Patriots who may have engaged in this enterprize, the Duke of Bedford, Mr. Fox, Mr. Erskine, and their illustrious Friends, who have supported these principles in Parliament, will undoubtedly receive the loudest applause of their Fellow-Citizens, and will justly be classed by the gratitude of Posterity among the greatest Benefactors of their Country. And private persons, like you, my dear Sir, and myself, retiring to their respective homes, in the evening of their days, without place or pension, without title or professional dignity, will enjoy in silence the proud but unenvied satisfaction to have served the Public with disinterested zeal and integrity, while the malignant tongue of Malice could impute no sinister motive to their conduct.

And surely this ground might be taken, without inconsistency, by the most strenuous

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Advocate of Universal Suffrage. In his publications he has maintained, and always will maintain, that mankind by nature are intitled to equal rights. He finds, however, that the English Nation are not now in the state of Nature, but in a state of imperfect Society, in which, though many things are right, some are wrong. Indeed, so wrong they are, that the utmost caution will be indispensibly necessary to avoid meeting ruin in one horrid form, from that very attempt to correct a deeply-disordered Legislature, without which ruin in a different, but not less frightful shape, must inevitably overtake us.—With perfect consistency, therefore, he might hold his principles, and yet in practice concur in any approximation to his theory, which the temper of the times would bear. This would be more than mere blameless consistency; it would be a virtuous and laudable policy, skilfully availing itself of existing circumstances, to educe from them the greatest good, and as much as possible exclude all evil. It would be true Patriotism, connected with wisdom; in practice extending the most effectual assistance to the cause of Reformation and human happiness at present, while in speculation it held forth those principles on which, in some happier age of greater Public

lic Virtue, Society may admit its final improvement.

But in the Popular Societies there may be some distrust, latent, if not expressed, to the Statesmen already alluded to, which may discourage the adoption of their plan. The Nation had been cheated by more than one Pretended Reformer, before the late Minister thought fit to drop the masque. Warned by repeated experience, the Country will not hastily yield its confidence to the professions of Public Men. But caution, pushed to excess, may be as pernicious to the Public Cause as even credulity has been; and though groundless distrust can excite no surprise, after treachery often experienced, it were neither wise nor just in this instance to adopt the distrust of the Societies in question. The truth of this assertion will sufficiently appear from a short comparative view of the circumstances which evidently distinguish the character and conduct of Mr. Pitt, from the manly wisdom and virtue which intitle Mr. Fox to the confidence of the Public.

In the character of Mr. Pitt, when in his early youth we acquired our good opinion, there was the supposed ingenuous candor natural at that age, with every favourable impression from Education and Parental Authority, undefaced by the wear and fric-

tion of Office, and untarnished by the filth of Corruption. It was right to trust him then, because he had the power, and professed the will to serve the Public; and by reposing trust in his professions of zeal, at a time when Peace had cooled the ardour of Reformers, no opportunity to serve the cause of Reformation was suffered to pass. But a few years have proved the emptiness of those professions, and shewn that the firm substance of a virtuous mind, which could be proof against every attempt of Power to warp it from the line of rectitude, was wanted there. And where that is wanted, there may be art, there may be eloquence, financial skill, and every other requisite qualification to form a Minister, fit to lead a degenerate Parliament; but there cannot be that virtuous uniformity of principles and conduct which is the only basis of a noble Character, and on which alone Faith can be reposed without the risque of Disappointment.

But now, War, with its concomitant miseries, has again evinced the necessity, and excited the popular wish for Reformation. It behoves us, with a wise caution, but with vigour also, to avail ourselves of this renewed opportunity, and shunning a blind credulity, to beware, on the other hand,

hand, lest we injure the Public Cause, by refusing confidence where it is justly due.

In several of the most distinguished Opponents of Mr. Pitt in each House of Parliament, the reverse of those circumstances may be observed, which mark his character and conduct with deserved distrust. But to compare only the foremost of his Antagonists: There is in him a character formed by Time, Experience, and Adversity, to that unbending Firmness which is fitted for the arduous task he has undertaken. With too much penetration to be deceived by a wily Court, with too much philanthropy, too strong a sense of Honour and Justice to betray the Public to its ruin, he possesses that scorn of Power, ill-gotten and ill-employed, that philosophic dignity of mind, that grandeur of consistency, which his inferior Rival never could attain. This the conduct of his maturer age has proved, and it forms the surest pledge that Yourself is not more sincerely devoted to the Cause of Freedom than Mr. FOX.

Proneness to ill-founded jealousy is the vice of weak and ignoble minds. It cannot therefore be a fault of which I can believe my friend is capable. In the case under consideration, I might assert, without fear of contradiction, that he cannot doubt the sincerity of Mr. Fox. If my reasoning has
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been just, if the principle recommended has been shewn to be best adapted to the exigency of this conjuncture, he will not hesitate to embrace it in practice, unmoved by the distrust of some popular Bodies, which he feels to be groundless; and unawed by the possible charge of inconsistency, which now he can repel with as much ease, as he before repelled it, when he generously supported the less extended plan of Mr. Pitt.

It ought not to be dissembled, however, that there is an objection unnoticed yet, and totally inapplicable to my worthy Friend, which wears too plausible an appearance, and is too likely, through their very virtues, to delude men well-disposed to the Public Cause, to be passed without a brief but attentive consideration. There is a contempt generally felt by such men for the Parties which have long divided, and alternately governed England: and it must be owned, that these Parties have but too frequently deserved this disgrace by their disregard of the Public Welfare, and their shameless pursuit of selfish advantage. Hence the fear which in virtuous men is observable, to be involved in their disgrace: hence the anxiety to shun powerful connections, and the reproachful appellation of a Partizan.

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But this honourable fear, this virtuous anxiety, may be pretended, where it is not felt; and even where it is, may be carried to an extreme which is unreasonable and hurtful to the Public. For when the Power of the Crown is become nearly Despotic; when nearly all the ancient Fences of Liberty have been overturned, and an immense accumulation of Patronage in the Crown, with the annual disposal of Fifty Millions of Money, imperiously calls upon every true Friend to his Country by timely Union to avert that dreadful calamity which is fast approaching: and when men of extensive influence and magnanimous character, of long experience, of tried integrity, and the most powerful abilities, have made a generous stand in Parliament against the invasions of Power; when they have claimed redress for the Nation on the wisest and most effectual principles, and pledged themselves never to accept Official Station without the stipulated condition of that radical Reform; and when, after a fruitless struggle, they have seceded from Parliament, and thus made their solemn appeal to the Public for support: At such a crisis, to reject Union with such Men on any alleged feeling of a virtuous Scrupulosity, or a noble Independence of Party - Connections, in my judgment

judgment must be deemed the excess of Folly, or the most consummate Hypocrisy. It must proceed from a false delicacy and a sickly sensibility, of which the robust minds of men like you, Sir, cannot be susceptible; or else from what must excite your scorn and detestation, from an affectation of Patriotic Purity, the excuse of Sloth, the cover of Pride, or the mere prudery of pretended Patriotism, which would sacrifice the substance to a false appearance of Virtue, and expose the Community to Ruin from the Lust of Power, by an assumed and extravagant refinement of Political Chastity.

If it had been the fate of this Country to have seen the Defence of her dearest Rights abandoned by the Statesmen alluded to, what rational hope would have remained that a timely Redress of her Grievances could be obtained by legal means? The prospect before us would have been most afflicting; it would have precluded every glimpse of Peaceful Reform, and opened to our view that long train of calamities which a conflict between Popular Desperation and Ministerial Tyranny would inevitably produce. The only objects of choice before us would have been Slavery, or that Resistance by Brute Force, from which the Friends of their Country can hardly ever
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labour too earnestly to dissuade the People. At the view of such misery, on either hand, though but the fiction of imagination, our hearts sink, and Despair freezes every faculty within us. But when we turn from this distressing alternative, to contemplate the characters and conduct of our Seceded Statesmen, and the honoured Senators who approve and support them, when such men have demonstrated their determined purpose never to abandon the Defence of the Constitution on its genuine principles, who does not feel himself re-animated, and his heart bounding with hope that all may yet be rectified, through Parliament, to the satisfaction of the Nation? Who does not feel it his duty to adhere to those men who adhere to the interest of the Public? Who does not scorn the false or puerile imputation of Party Spirit applied to such Adherence? Who does not resolve never to abandon men who thus generously support the Rights of the Community, and cheerfully to co-operate with them on their principles of a safe, yet radical Reform, on which alone the Freedom and Happiness of the Community can be recovered and secured?

If I may indulge the hope that you are satisfied with my reasoning, and content to

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admit the change proposed in the Association, it will be to me matter of high gratification and encouragement. In that case you will readily anticipate the changes I wish to be made in your printed Letter. I would request the omission of the latter part of it, containing the Defence of Universal Suffrage, and in the former part I would propose an alteration of the Title of the Association. In my thoughts, it might be thus expressed, viz. "The Association for protecting Liberty and Property from the Dangers of Despotism and Anarchy, and for perpetuating the Limited Monarchy of this United Kingdom, by effecting a Parliamentary Reform through Parliament itself, on the Genuine Principles of the Constitution." If you should admit these alterations, my sentiments will go in concurrence with yours, and I shall highly approve the formation of such a Society in London. Whether my name and attendance may be given without offence in Yorkshire, and greater injury to the Cause than benefit, I am not quite certain. On this point I will consult my Friends, and act with their concurrence.

I have only now to add, that I am fully sensible of the good-will and esteem so kindly

kindly expressed in your Letter; and I do constantly rely upon the continuance of that friendship, of which I have received so many proofs.

I am with great regard, dear Sir,

Most faithfully your's,

C. WYVILL.

L. Lund, Printer.